

# Public Participation in Post-Fordist Urban Green Space Governance: The Case of Community Gardens in Berlin

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## Abstract

*This article examines citizen participation in the governance of contemporary urban green space. Rather than exploring normative questions of ideal forms of participatory democracy, it focuses on changing roles and relationships between local state and non-state actors in order to identify and explain the changing nature of participation. I argue that neoliberal urban restructuring has changed the conditions for participation and thus participation itself in fundamental ways and that we need an account of changes in statehood and governance in order to capture this conceptually. Based on the case of community gardens in Berlin, the article discusses the extent to which this changed relationship is expressed by current citizen participation as well as the potential and problems that result from it. My empirical results show the emergence of a new political acceptance of autonomously organized projects and active citizen participation in urban green space governance. The central argument of this article is that this new acceptance can be conceptualized as an expression of the neoliberalization of cities. Nevertheless, this neoliberal strategy at the same time leads to complex and contradictory outcomes and the resulting benefits are also acknowledged.*

## Introduction

This article examines the role of citizen participation in contemporary urban green space governance. Rather than exploring normative questions of ideal forms of participatory democracy (Silver *et al.*, 2010, this issue), it focuses on changing roles and relationships between local state and non-state actors in order to identify and explain the changing nature of participation. Based on literature inspired by regulation theory, the article situates citizen participation in the context of ‘actually existing neo-liberalism’ (Brenner and Theodore, 2002a). The starting point of the article is an understanding of the process of neoliberalizing cities, that not only entails entrepreneurial strategies, but in which also civic engagement gains importance as a substitute for welfarist functions of the local state. Based on a literature review and an empirical case, I argue that neoliberal urban restructuring has changed the conditions for participation and thus participation itself in fundamental ways, and that we need an account of changes in statehood in order to capture this conceptually. These developments lead to ambivalent outcomes, which the article also aims to explore.

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The article is organized as follows. I first summarize core arguments from the literature on the neoliberalization of cities and the effect it has had on participation. Secondly, I present my empirical case study on community gardens in Berlin. Thirdly, I summarize these empirical cases concerning the changing roles and aims of the local state. Finally, I conclude by discussing the case in the context of neoliberal urban restructuring and the specific Berlin situation.

## Citizen participation in neoliberalizing cities

The term 'neoliberalizing cities' refers here to work inspired by regulation theory that focuses on the implementation since the 1980s of neoliberal ideology through urban policy (e.g. Painter and Goodwin, 2000; Brenner and Theodore, 2002b; 2005; Jessop, 2002; Peck and Tickell, 2002). Three observations are crucial for my argument here:

Firstly, there has been a shift in planning paradigms towards competition and a new *understanding of cities as entrepreneurs* and enterprises (Harvey, 1989; Hall and Hubbard, 1998). Urban development policies are now primarily directed towards business development and less towards the provision of collective services, which used to be the traditional core-task of the local state (Mayer, 1994). Public parks, as a part of urban collective infrastructures in the city, are affected by this reorientation of urban policies.

Secondly, new forms of *governance-beyond-the-state* have emerged from the transformation of the welfare state towards the activating state (for a critique cf. Esser, 1998; Lindenberg, 2002; Swyngedouw, 2005). This has led to an increasing importance of non-state actors and to a transformation of roles, responsibilities and institutional configurations of the (local) state and citizens in urban spatial politics.

Lastly, this development goes hand in hand with the *rising importance of civic engagement* and a new focus on territorially defined local communities as a relevant actor in urban governance. Neo-communitarians in particular advocate that civic society and community are the opposite and alternative to market-led and competition-oriented neoliberal politics (Etzioni, 1993). On the other hand, critical research suggests that voluntary engagement within the community fulfils the role of compensating for the state's retreat from its former welfarist functions (Evers, 2002; Mayer, 2003; Roth, 2003; Amin, 2005) and for the worst consequences of 'pure' neoliberal — or neoclassical — strategies such as deregulation and privatization. Jessop (2002: 108) identifies the rise of a new political ethos that 'tends to promote "community" (or a plurality of self-organizing communities) as a flanking, compensatory mechanism for the inadequacies of this market mechanism'.

However, community-based and controlled services do not seem to be the only or even primary answer to neoliberal restructuring. Instead, they address the longstanding left-wing critique of the Fordist welfare state. On the one hand, the specific forms and institutions of social welfare were criticized. In particular, the criticism of the bureaucratic, mechanized and incapacitating health service led to a massive explosion of self-help groups in the 1970s and 1980s which were at that time by no means accepted by the all-embracing, protecting and controlling state. Collective self-help was contested, clients should remain inactive, participation needed to be won (among many others, see Thiel, 1994 for the German context). On the other hand, the criticism addressed the repressive function of the state. Beside the protection against material risks (illness, age, unemployment, etc.), the task of the welfare state has also been the regulation of the labour supply through discrimination, privileges, discipline and control. Extension and perfection of the social state were closely associated with an expansion of the control of its citizens, with the cooperation of the education system, police, justice, working and social management (see e.g. Hirsch, 1982; Krätke and Schmoll, 1987: 64ff.; Rose, 1996: 330).

As a result, the Keynesian welfare state came under attack by neoliberal as well as left-wing critics. The situation today is therefore a product of those critiques, but also an ongoing incorporation of left-wing critique and language into neoliberal policy. Regarding urban policy, thus not only is entrepreneurialism encouraged on the local level, but so are new forms of social cohesion and community participation (Jessop, 2001; Brenner and Theodore, 2002a). Theoretical as well as empirical research (e.g. Elwood, 2002; Ghose, 2005; Herbert, 2005; Geddes, 2006) has shown how neoliberal urban governance has shaped *citizen participation* on the local scale in the following five respects:

- 1 A growing responsibility of citizens and civic institutions corresponding to the neoliberal goal of greater institutional efficiency, which is usually not accompanied by increasing resources, influence and power (Ghose, 2005).
- 2 The outsourcing and privatization of state services towards the profit-making and the non-profit sector and to volunteering citizens (Bondi and Laurie, 2005).
- 3 The emergence of a discourse of collaboration that ‘has the potential to depoliticise urban governance practices and effectively discipline community organizations into forms of participation that are more manageable for the state’ (Elwood, 2002: 123).
- 4 The co-optation of energy, time and agendas of participating citizens (Elwood, 2002).
- 5 Increased competitiveness among community-groups — e.g. as they compete for grant funding — at the expense of cooperation (see e.g. MacKinnon, 2000: 298).

These general trends are path-dependent and recent research on neoliberal urban transformations acknowledges the ‘uneven, contentious, volatile and uncertain character’ (Brenner and Theodore, 2005: 101) of these restructuring processes. Participatory processes and the downloading of responsibility onto community groups can lead to complex and contradictory outcomes — it may serve a neoliberal agenda, but at the same time still foster an emancipatory agenda. This points to the high spatial variability of these outcomes (Elwood, 2002; 2004), which, therefore, will also be further explored in this article.

In providing an analysis of participation in urban governance ‘on the ground’ and over time, this article moreover seeks to overcome a binary opposition present in theoretical discussion on participatory democracy (for a discussion see Silver *et al.*, this issue) and rather tries to show how bottom-up and top-down approaches as well as consensus and confrontation, and making use of direct and representative forms of democracy, are all present in the strategies of parties involved. However, this article is also in agreement with Aylett (2010, this issue) and Becher (2010, this issue) in their emphasis on conflict and clashes of interest as positive elements that are ever present in these processes — i.e. also in deliberation — as they are in a capitalist society in general. I argue that the shape and outcome of participatory processes are hardly determined by an imaginary ‘perfect’ participatory models or tools, by deliberation and the ‘power of the better argument,’ nor indeed by the ‘perfect’ protest strategy, but rather by the real-existing balance of forces, by (mostly mundane) struggles, and by the historically and geographically specific circumstances and conditions of these struggles.

Based on the above literature review, the article will now turn to the case study on community gardens in Berlin. It will focus on the first two observations concerning participation and neoliberal urban governance, thus referring to the changing role of state and non-state actors in urban green space governance by addressing the following questions:

- 1 To what extent are the changing conditions for citizen participation expressed in the changing role of state and non-state actors?
- 2 What are the potentials and limits of citizen participation in the context of neoliberal restructuring of urban governance?

## Urban green space governance in Berlin

As a result of the leftist critique of the paternalistic welfare state described above, the 1970s saw the formation of New Social Movements (for the German context, see Brand *et al.*, 1986) and *Bürgerinitiativen* (citizens' action committees) concerned with municipal policies and the urban environment (see Roth, 1994 among others). For example, radical protest and self-help was expressed in the squatting movement of the early 1980s in West Berlin (Bodenschatz *et al.*, 1983). As part of the environmental movement people also protested 'against the administrative control of urban greenery' (Meissle, 1998: 248, translation by author) by starting to green patios and backyards of tenement housing blocks, lobbying for more urban green spaces and even publicly squatting in existing open spaces to protect them from development.<sup>1</sup>

A look at urban green space governance in Berlin today reveals entrepreneurial strategies *as well as* the call for more civic engagement. The severe cuts in public funding for public green space, due to a severe fiscal crisis of the City of Berlin (Krätke, 2004), led to a search for new ways of maintaining parks, playgrounds and other public green spaces. The City of Berlin adopted entrepreneurial strategies like the formal privatization of parks, the introduction of park entrance fees, the increased use of the low-wage sector and workfare programs for maintenance and the outsourcing of maintenance work to private companies. At the same time — and of particular importance to this article — local politicians have specifically called for civic engagement as a form of citizen participation (EA.UE, 2000; Schröder, 2000; Krug-Gbur and Preisler-Holl, 2004). For example, in 2004 one borough (*Bezirk*) started an initiative for the 'rescue of the borough parks' (slogan of the campaign), in which local residents were encouraged to adopt their parks. Another campaign from a different borough also asked for volunteers to support the parks department. In both cases the calls for civic engagement were justified with the lack of funding for public green spaces.<sup>2</sup>

Although the current situation in Berlin is influenced both by left-wing as well as neoliberal critique of the welfare state, I will argue that the increasing interest of the City of Berlin in civic engagement has to be related mainly to a new, neoliberal model of the state. This model changed from Fordist welfare and the *Sicherheitsstaat* (security state) (Hirsch, 1980) to an 'activating and enabling state' (see above), particularly expressed by the 'Red-Green' government in power from 1998 to 2005.<sup>3</sup>

## Community gardening in Berlin

Here I will look at a specific example of civic engagement: community gardens. I chose community gardens as a case study because firstly the engagement expressed here is a form of a long-term commitment (as opposed to day-long neighbourhood clean-ups for

- 1 In East Berlin at the same time, people were involved in environmental initiatives ranging from officially accepted conservationist groups to alternative and persecuted groups like the Berlin *Umweltbibliothek* (Environmental Library) (Rüddenklau, 1992). Because of the highly different political and social context in the GDR, these examples cannot be classified equally as part of NSM as in the West.
- 2 The financial situation is undoubtedly severe: Whereas in 1993 the different boroughs altogether had about €60 million at their disposal for the maintenance of public parks, in 2003 it was only €20 million. In 2000 the boroughs received on average only 39% of what they needed for the maintenance of standards (EA.UE, 2000: 25). For detailed information on diverse strategies in Berlin based on an analysis of official documents and reports, websites, newspaper articles, etc. see Rosol (2006: 83–118).
- 3 This new *leitbild* of the state is also expressed in urban policies, e.g. the introduction of new instruments of urban renewal like the programmes *Soziale Stadt* — Social City and *Quartiersmanagement* — Neighbourhood Management (see Silver *et al.*, this issue; for a German critique, see Mayer, 2002; Krummacher *et al.*, 2003).

example), and secondly the way such a garden is run is to a large extent self-determined. That means that the case of community gardens is especially complex for the study of neoliberalism because it is not pure outsourcing of maintenance work, but is profoundly defined by grassroots characteristics.<sup>4</sup>

I define community gardens as public green spaces run by volunteers. They have to be distinguished from the well-known — private — German allotment gardens (*Schrebergärten*). Community gardens have no widely acknowledged common definition. Nevertheless, we can find community gardens or forms of collective urban agriculture worldwide (Mathéy, 2000; Meyer-Renschhausen, 2002; Baker, 2004; Haidle and Arndt, 2007). Most of these gardens have both an economic function (food provision) and a social function (provision of social contact), irrespective of the geographical region in which they are situated. Often urban gardening projects are also political battles around the power of disposition over (urban public) space.<sup>5</sup> Existing German studies fail to capture the complexity of this kind of urban gardening. They are either based on the perspective of urban agriculture (Lohrberg, 2001) or concentrate on the specific forms of green interim uses (BBR, 2004; cet-0 and studio urban catalyst, 2004; Eißner and Heydenreich, 2004).

For the purpose of my research, and in contrast to other forms of urban gardening, the collective and public character of community gardens is essential for their definition. Public character in most of the studied cases also means full public access anytime. Although some of the gardens are only temporarily open to the general public, they can still fulfil important social or other functions that are relevant for a broader group of people or for the whole neighbourhood. In contrast to North American community gardens (Baker, 2004; Meyer-Renschhausen, 2004; Saldivar-Tanaka and Krasny, 2004) though, the Berlin gardens mostly do not serve productive functions. Flowers and shrubs are more commonly planted, and vegetables are planted for demonstration purposes, not as agricultural crops. Most gardens have collective areas as well as individual beds. The community garden groups are organized in different ways, ranging from loose groups to formally registered associations. The groups get funding from different sources: member fees and member donations, donations from outside or prize money. Most of them get public funding as well, sometimes only for the creation of the gardens, sometimes also for maintenance costs.

With the following four examples of Berlin community gardens, I aim to identify the changing circumstances for involved community garden activists by comparing the only two surviving community gardening projects from the early 1980s and two newer gardens created around the year 2000. Particular attention will be paid to creation, aims, and the role of the local state and thus to the following two questions: who started the garden project and what were their aims in doing so?<sup>6</sup>

4 The case study is based on 44 semi-structured in-depth interviews and another 24 shorter interviews — some of them as group interviews — with community gardeners from 14 garden projects (N=26) and support organizations (N=12), local politicians and administrators (N=16), academics (N=6) and environmental organizations (N=8) conducted in 2003–04 and analysed with MaxQDA qualitative data analysis software. Further sources are participatory observation and analysis of secondary literature, media coverage and policy papers (for detailed information on methods see Rosol, 2006).

5 This is especially well documented for New York City (Schmelzkopf, 1995; 2002; Staeheli *et al.*, 2002; Hassell, 2005; for another example see e.g. Lebuhn, 2008). Here the guerilla gardening movement stands out, which became famous in New York City in the 1970s (Meyer-Renschhausen, 2004; Reynolds, 2008).

6 There is limited data available on other and failing examples of older gardens, thus no representative sample can be provided. Although the possibility of earlier non-surviving state-organized gardens cannot be entirely eliminated, it is very unlikely given the all-embracing role of the state in the 1970s and 1980s and its unwillingness to engage self-help groups (see literature review above).



### Lichtenrader Volkspark

The oldest example is from 1977, when an informal garden was established on land that was earmarked as a construction site. The tenants of the adjacent large-scale housing development got together with professional community workers of the local church and a local citizens' action committee, *Bürgerinitiative Lichtenrade Ost*, to protest against the further density that the construction of more high-rises in an already very dense housing estate would cause, and they lobbied for a park instead. The neighbourhood already severely lacked open public space and — although situated at the margins of West Berlin — there was no access to the surrounding rural areas because of the Berlin Wall. More apartment housing would only increase this imbalance. The protest initiatives did not stop at fighting development, but proposed the creation of a public park that would be in care of the community. In 1981, the activists founded the association *Lichtenrader Volkspark e.V.* After symbolic squatting on the land, planting shrubs and trees for publicity, neighbourhood parties, public relations work and endless negotiations with local councillors, a contract for a small part of the land was agreed with the borough in 1984. Not until 1989 was the use of the whole plot as a park completely legalized.

It is the largest — 4.5 hectares — of the projects I studied and the one which most resembles a typical public park in appearance. Unlike common public parks however, its funding is mainly based on membership fees, donations and voluntary work. Except on some rare occasions — when the city financed specific projects (such as a community composter) or when the association won an 'environmental prize' and a prize for social engagement from the borough of Berlin-Tempelhof — there has been no public funding. The park is situated on public property and the Association leases the land — at no cost — from the borough under the condition that it is fully accessible to the public at all times.

### Kinderbauernhof Mauerplatz Kreuzberg

This urban farm for children in Berlin-Kreuzberg came into existence as a result of squatting on derelict land right beside the Berlin Wall in 1981. A registered association (*Kinderbauernhof Mauerplatz e.V.*) was founded in the same year. In contrast to other projects examined in this article, the urban farm is not solely about gardening, but also includes the care of domestic animals (horses, donkeys, ducks, etc.). The idea to create an urban farm for children in Kreuzberg dates back to circa 1979. Organized mainly by single mothers, the aim was to create an educationally supervised green space for small children in this densely built-up inner-city borough.

At the same time, the project was part of a broader social movement of squatters and other social activists against the predominant urban renewal policies of that time (*Kahlschlagsanierung*, the clearance of old tenements to make way for new high-rise buildings). With the founding of the *Kinderbauernhof* (children's farm) the group could criticize these policies as well as demonstrate alternative ways of creating a city. Members of the group have been actively engaged not only in environmental and educational topics, but also in local politics in general. One of the founders became a borough council member and actively influenced the local democratic system. The project has been an integral part of the neighbourhood for over 25 years. Although mainly organized by alternative and left-wing oriented white Germans, the users of the site reflect the diversity of the neighbourhood. One of the people involved in the project describes the involvement of the neighbourhood as follows:

It was part of the autonomous scene. Or at least it was referred to as such, although the social mix has been broader since the beginnings. How this project emerged was very much linked to the squatters' movement. But already in 1984, when I joined the group, there was a larger social mix. There were seniors from the neighbourhood. And people from churches and Turkish neighbours . . . According to my experience there aren't many places where German and Turkish neighbours are in such close contact [as here] (interview with gardener, 19/2003).

The plot of about one hectare in size remained a squat for 20 years until in 2001 — after a long battle with the borough's politicians and administration — the association obtained a contract for over five years from the borough of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg. During this long period of 20 years, the *Kinderbauernhof* remained highly contested, because the project evolved from the resistance against a misguided urban development policy and in direct confrontation with urban planners and local politics.

### Kids' Garden Neukölln

The Kids' Garden (its name in German) is one of the newer projects. The concept of the Kids' Garden was first mooted in 1998. Soon a registered association (*Grün für Kinder e.V.* — Green Spaces for Children) was formed, and in 1999 it opened the garden. It is located in an area of urban renewal in the borough of Neukölln. The garden is for interim use only, and established on public land for at least 10 years. After that period, and pending sufficient financing, a public kindergarten and a public path connecting two streets are planned for the 3,000 m<sup>2</sup> plot.

The idea for the garden came from the formal neighbourhood representation body (*Betroffenenvertretung*) assigned as representatives in the urban renewal process, but was mostly self-organized by 14 parents' initiatives, which run private childcare facilities (*Kinderläden*) in the area. Their aim was to create outdoor facilities for their children, and provide environmental education and exposure. Children in this dense inner-city borough should have the opportunity to experience nature, to grow their own plants and to develop creativity while playing with natural materials. The project has common areas, and also small plots reserved for the different children's groups. Here the children can grow flowers, fruits and vegetables. The garden is usually locked, and apart from public events, is only accessible for the children, their educators, parents and their parents' friends. It is estimated that the garden is used by 250 children and 100 adults.

Northern Neukölln, like Kreuzberg, is an ethnically diverse neighbourhood and inhabitants with a Turkish background form a large proportion of the population. It is also one of the poorest neighbourhoods in Berlin.<sup>7</sup> The Kids' Garden nevertheless is mostly organized by white middle-class Germans, typical for private childcare groups in Germany. Migrant inhabitants can use the garden through some of the children's facilities, but are not represented in the association itself.<sup>8</sup>

The creation of the garden was basically self-organized, and the parents' association finances the operating costs. Planners within the framework of the 'Neighbourhood Management' and the urban renewal institutions actively supported the creation of the garden. The municipality was involved in facilitating the contract, organized soil tests and paid for setup costs. The association hopes to continue to use the plot even after the first contract ends. This hope is not unrealistic because the restricted financial situation of the Berlin government means that further development on the sites is unlikely.

This project stands out because of its restricted public usage, which raises issues of exclusion and privatization. It is the least public garden in my research. The existence of locked gates is justified by the parents association with reference to the specific needs of small children. In favour of the garden it also has to be acknowledged that its creation

7 In the direct surroundings of the garden (an area called Reuterplatz) in 2005 about 31.9 % of the inhabitants did not have German citizenship (source: <http://www.statistik-berlin.de/statistiken/EinwohnArbeitsm/bez08.htm>) compared to the Berlin average of only 12 %. Neukölln's unemployment rate is significantly higher than the Berlin average: 23.7 % (2008) versus 16.5 % (2006, source: <http://www.berlin.de/ba-neukoelln/derbezirk/arbeit.html>) and the household net income is only €1,300 per month versus €1,500 per month in Berlin (2004; 2006, source: <http://www.berlin.de/berlin-im-ueberblick/zahlenfakten/index.de.html>).

8 In order to tackle that problem and to create community gardening space especially for migrant users, there have since circa 2000 been 'Intercultural Gardens' established in Berlin and many other German cities (for a short summary on some Berlin gardens, see Rosol, 2006: 187–200, for general information see <http://www.stiftung-interkultur.de/eng/index.htm>).

did not close public space, but instead opened up a former private plot for the use of children from the neighbourhood. It still remains an ambivalent example because it is a garden where committed parents (have to) organize collectively in order to create — exclusive — green outdoor spaces for their children because the local authority does not adequately provide publicly accessible open spaces.

### Neighbourhood Garden 'Dolziger Straße' Friedrichshain

This garden was opened in 2002 and is also situated in a designated urban renewal area (*Sanierungsgebiet*). It is a very dense inner-city neighbourhood dating back to the end of the nineteenth century. Regarding built structures and densities, it is a neighbourhood similar to the one mentioned above where the Kids' Garden Neukölln is situated. This garden is located in East Berlin in a less diverse neighbourhood than Kreuzberg or Neukölln. Unlike the other examples, this garden is located on the private land of a single owner. The empty plot — about 800 m<sup>2</sup> in size — is a relic of World War II bombing. The initial idea for this project came from the neighbourhood representation (*Betroffenenvertretung*), along with the urban renewal administration of the borough and the assigned urban planning bureau *Stattbau GmbH*.

The starting point for the initiation of an interim use by the borough was the severe lack of open green spaces in the area and empty plots used as garbage dumps with no foreseeable development in the imminent future. The aims were to improve the appearance of the neglected site and to foster civic engagement. The process was initiated in 2000 and subsequently supported by urban planners. Through guided walks in the neighbourhood and participative planning workshops, municipal staff provided the prerequisites for forming a group of neighbours who took on the responsibility for the lot. Municipal planners played a crucial role not only in initiating this kind of land use, but also in providing information and assistance and in funding the ongoing process. Nevertheless, only the gardening group makes decisions about what actually happens on these plots. The project is not free from conflict though: a group of about 12 neighbours wants the borough to buy the piece of land and guarantee its long-term use. Although the borough acknowledges the lack of open spaces, the aim of urban renewal for the plot is still the redevelopment of the site. The landowner can give notice as soon as a building permit is issued.

Despite having initiated the projects, the state representatives see the local authority's role in these initiatives as supportive rather than leading because: 'this kind of initiative from above, from the administration, well, you can do that, but it does not correspond to our idea, actually. Basically that is the call for the state which, I think, is not appropriated anymore' (interview with borough planning staff, 13/2003). This project thus exemplifies the turn towards the 'enabling and activating' state as characterized above.

## The changing role of the local state

Looking at only these four examples, one finds very different models of creating a community garden (see Table 1). We have seen a self-organized park, which was supported by professional community workers from the local church (Lichtenrader Volkspark). The urban farm for children is an example of a grassroots project, part of a broader social movement and developed in confrontation with urban planners. The newer Kids' Garden is also an autonomously organized project, but was developed in cooperation with urban planners. The last example — the neighbourhood garden in Friedrichshain — was initiated mainly by urban planners and supported by politicians. This suggests that the role and involvement of the local state has shifted over time, from antagonism towards a kind of self-determined land use, towards supporting or even



**Table 1** Analysis of case study gardens

Name	Lichtenrader Volkspark	Kinderbauernhof Mauerplatz Kreuzberg	Kids' Garden Neukölln	Neighbourhood Garden 'Dolziger Straße' Friedrichshain
Founded	1979	1981	1998	2002
Size	4.5 hectares	9,000 m <sup>2</sup>	3,000 m <sup>2</sup>	818 m <sup>2</sup>
Established by	Community organizer and community pressure group, local neighbours	Community pressure group, squatter movement, local neighbours	Private parents' initiatives, with support from formal neighbourhood representation	By order of urban renewal administration of the district, with support from formal neighbourhood representation
Maintained and managed by	Trägerverein Lichtenrader Volkspark e.V. (formal civic association)	Kinderbauernhof am Mauerplatz e.V. (formal civic association)	Grün für Kinder e.V. (formal civic association)	Neighbourhood group (informal association)
Role of local state	Opponent, later negotiation partner	Opponent	Support, cooperation	Key role in initiation and organisation, ongoing support (funding, information, assistance)
Funding of operating costs	Mainly membership fees and private donation	Mainly membership fees and private donation, in part public project funding	Mainly membership fees	Mainly public
Land ownership	Public (purchased 1986)	Public	Public (purchased 1997)	Private
Legal status	Long-term lease contract since 1989	Temporary contract since 2001 (to be renewed periodically)	Long-term lease contract since 1998	Temporary contract since 2002 (to be renewed annually)
Foreseen (other?) uses	Dedicated public green space in Berlin land use plan	Kindergarten (abandoned), School, housing (no specified uses)	Public greenway and kindergarten	Mixed building development by private investor
Public access	Possible anytime by anyone	Possible anytime by anyone	Restricted	Possible anytime by anyone

initiating it. It also indicates a turn from community gardens as part of urban social movements towards community gardens as a form of voluntarism.

How does the local state justify its present engagement? In the interviews I conducted with local politicians and urban planners working in the administration, three reasons were given for their support of volunteer-run gardening projects in the public sphere:

Firstly — and not surprisingly — their support and call for voluntary engagement for public spaces results from severe cuts in public spending for open green spaces in Berlin. Voluntarism is seen as a means of dealing with this problem.

Secondly, they hope for an improved appearance of the neighbourhood. It should look clean, pretty and secure, and voluntary work by neighbours, their presence in the lots and the associated social control are seen as an effective tool to ensure this. One background for this new interest in the public realm is that the traditional task of providing affordable housing through urban renewal has decreased dramatically in Germany and is no longer considered a public responsibility (Holm, 2006). Policymakers' interest in rearranging the public realm according to middle-class values is a common trend worldwide, closely attached to gentrification and 'urban renaissance' (Imrie and Raco, 2003; Porter and Shaw, 2009).

Finally, the planners and state administrators argue politically for a stimulation of civic engagement, community responsibility and social capital in order to 'stabilize the neighbourhood' (interview with borough staff, 13/2003). These aims are clearly expressed in the following quote:

The financial situation is really always the fulcrum and pivot. That's unfortunate to a certain extent. But, on the other hand there is also . . . this whole approach, how can you strengthen again an orientation towards the common good, towards the community. The fact that one should not only count on the state, but also, as far as possible, take care of something with one's own resources (interview with borough councillor, 45/2004).

This quote says clearly that the starting point of the new interest in volunteering is the lack of funding for the parks maintenance. At the same time the councillor alludes to 'the common good' and demands more input by the 'community', including taking on responsibility and providing resources as a community member. In this respect, this quote connects the two trends of neoliberalizing cities — the lack of funding for public infrastructures and the responsabilization of the 'the community' (Rose, 1996; Jessop, 2002) — in an exemplary way.

## Conclusion

The first question raised in this article was: to what extent can the changing conditions for participation be analysed looking at the changing role of state and non-state actors in urban governance? In order to answer this question, I looked at a specific example of urban green spaces that combines participatory and grassroots approaches, civic engagement and local protest. In line with theoretical observations, my empirical case study shows a new acceptance by the local state of collectively run urban green spaces. Whereas in the early 1980s citizen groups who wanted to green public spaces were stymied by the local state and had to fight for their right to influence their environment, today such projects are actively encouraged and supported by the city administration and politicians. How can this be explained?

Part of it is certainly the success of grassroots activism and lobbying, of social struggle and active participation in local politics. Pioneer projects certainly eased things for the future generation of gardens and increased their acceptance. However, in this article I want to draw attention to the fact that the conditions that brought the newer gardens into existence are also an expression of the 'actually existing neoliberalization'

of cities, where the local state withdraws from its welfarist functions and civic engagement is seen as a cheap solution. The newer gardens exemplify the turn towards the 'enabling and activating' state (Neighbourhood Garden 'Dolziger Straße' Friedrichshain) or the increasing responsibility of private actors for the provision of services (Kids' Garden).

Nevertheless, the specific situation of Berlin also has to be taken into account, since restructuring processes are path-dependent and uneven. That means, although we can detect a general trend of neoliberalization in many cities worldwide, there are still inherited regulatory landscapes, national and municipal legislation, the specific social and economic situation of any given city, and specific circumstances like the amount of land owned by that city, which have to be taken into account. In the specific case presented here, many of the studied gardens on public land became possible only because of the appalling budgetary situation of the City of Berlin. Because the City was not willing or able to fund the foreseen collective infrastructure, land fell vacant. This opened up a possibility for interim uses like gardens. As a result however, the gardens will have to go as soon as the eventual use — like a kindergarten in case of the Kids' Garden — has obtained financing and can finally be realized. Gardens on private land, on the other hand, became possible due to the specific situation of the real estate market in Berlin. The plots are empty because development is currently not profitable enough. In this case too these gardens have no long-term guarantee. In their contract, Friedrichshain's community gardeners had to agree to clear the land as soon as private investors show interest and, subsequently, a building permit is issued.

Insofar as this new acceptance of community green spaces is not a general appreciation of independently run green spaces and the support is only for temporary uses of urban brownfield sites, the tenure of community gardens in Berlin is fragile. The current arrangements are only valid until 'big investors' come back into the city. Comments by Berlin officials and their insistence on the term 'interim use' suggest that gardens are seen mostly as a stop-gap measure or a second-best option in times of slow real estate development. This is also related to the fact that the gardens meet certain aspirations of the local state, but do not tackle the real problem: the maintenance of larger existing parks.

Even if only temporary, however, support from urban planners stemming from limited financial resources and a reorientation towards community responsibility and volunteering has changed the possible fields of action of community greening projects. Therefore I posed a second series of questions: what chances and problems does the new acceptance or even support of self-organized use of open space by the local state imply? Does it open up new opportunities? Or is self-help the only chance for deprived urban areas to get any public green space? This is always an empirical question, which thus cannot be answered in general. The study of the history of Berlin community gardening projects shows that the new situation leads to a complex outcome providing both opportunities and problems.

The acknowledgement and support of community gardens, on the one hand, make possible the emergence of new spaces with other uses, other designs and styles, with or without regulations. Also the gardens initiated and supported by the local state open up former private space and offer self-determined space, decentralized and non-bureaucratic solutions. These spaces are appreciated and used by local residents. In some cases, the gardens function as an important social meeting point for a neighbourhood. They have the potential for raising political awareness, which goes beyond the actual garden. And even if they were originally thought of as being only for interim uses, there is a good chance of securing them after they have successfully operated for a while and won enough support from residents and others.<sup>9</sup>

9 See the longevity of the 'interim' allotment gardens in Berlin, which have been in existence for more than 100 years now (Gröning, 2000).

On the other hand, community services provision serves as a neoliberal strategy because it can support the outsourcing of responsibility for public infrastructures like parks. Both the reasons given by planners and other City officials for their support as well as some contradictions within the gardens themselves point into that direction. In that regard the example of 'Kids' Garden' is especially ambiguous. In this way, self-help is legitimated as compensation for cuts in funding public infrastructure maintenance and for the devastating effects of neoliberal restructuring. And even if the state still provides some funding for the gardening groups, their volunteering is basically used as cheap labour.<sup>10</sup> More generally, the rising status of private actors in urban green space governance opens up questions of democratic provision and control of public infrastructures including urban public green space.

In sum, although the support of community garden projects cannot be classified exclusively as a neoliberal strategy, this new acceptance of community groups is very ambiguous: it is both functional and fragile, given that only temporary uses are encouraged. Gardening groups have to acknowledge these new circumstances. They can use this support to promote their own cause, but have to be aware of the local state's differing interests.

If we look at the historical changes of community gardening in Berlin we can find a shift from community gardening with strong connections to urban social movements towards community gardening as a form of voluntarism or the provision of social services. This of course has important implications for the question of participation. The changes discussed earlier of participation in the context of neoliberalizing cities are relevant here: the withdrawal of funding from public infrastructures and the resulting outsourcing and privatization of state services as well as the responsabilization of citizens for the provision of services are especially obvious in the green space governance of Berlin today. Also the increasing competition for public funding between different groups can be detected, although also new funding sources are opening up. The discourse of collaboration and participation as co-optation (see section on 'Citizen Participation in Neoliberalizing Cities') are less important in the analysed cases.

From another perspective we can see that different strategies and phases which are often shown as contrary (Silver *et al.*, this issue) are all part of the participatory experiences described here. Although generally this article claims that earlier community gardening projects were developed from a more oppositional stance using confrontational strategies, these projects also used deliberation and negotiations — especially around land tenure — to secure their goals. Equally the newer projects, although created in a deliberative manner and with support from the local authority, have to push for their interests: the garden 'Dolziger Straße' in Friedrichshain for a long-term guarantee of their project, the Kids' Garden against the borough's efforts to create a public greenway and kindergarten. The main difference consists therefore less in the strategies used than in the view of the state and of the projects themselves.

This means that in the general discussion on urban contention and deliberation this article pleads for the importance of the historical and geographical specificity — and for an analytical rather than a normative approach towards questions of participation. In this we are able to see how participatory experiences change with changes in society in general, and how this must lead to very different theoretical and political evaluations of the projects themselves.

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10 The money the borough provides for the garden in Friedrichshain for example (about €3,000 annually for maintenance plus contractual payment of the planning bureau) would be a drop in the ocean if it were directly running a public park.

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## Résumé

*Cet article examine la participation citoyenne dans la gouvernance de l'espace vert urbain contemporain. Plutôt que de s'attacher aux aspects normatifs de formes idéales de démocratie participative, il s'intéresse au changement dans les rôles et les relations entre les acteurs locaux gouvernementaux et non gouvernementaux, afin de repérer et d'expliquer la nature évolutive de la participation. La restructuration urbaine néolibérale a modifié, de manière fondamentale, les conditions de la participation et, par conséquent, la participation elle-même. Le restituer sur le plan conceptuel implique de décrire les changements dans la nature de l'État et la gouvernance. S'appuyant sur le cas des jardins communautaires berlinois, l'article analyse la mesure dans laquelle cette relation évolutive s'exprime dans la participation actuelle des habitants, ainsi que le potentiel et les problèmes qui en découlent. Les résultats empiriques montrent l'émergence d'une nouvelle acceptation politique à l'égard de projets organisés de façon autonome et d'une participation citoyenne active dans la gouvernance de l'espace vert urbain. Selon l'argument central de cet article, cette nouvelle acceptation peut être conceptualisée comme un mode d'expression de la néolibéralisation des villes. Néanmoins, cette stratégie néolibérale conduit parallèlement à des décisions à la fois complexes et contradictoires, et les avantages qui en résultent sont également reconnus.*